

COLLECTING AUSTRALIAN TEXTILES

AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) is home to a rich collection of fashion and textiles that spans both the Australian and International collections. Focus on the collecting of textiles made by Australian practitioners and designers began in the early twentieth century. The department of Australian Fashion & Textiles, which was created as a separate collection in 2002, now houses a significant collection dating from the 1840s to the present. It includes examples of patchwork, knit, lace, woven, embroidered, and printed fabrics.

This brief article will attempt to provide an overview of the Australian textile collection and the diversity of works which have been collected since the early 20th century. Fashion and textiles at the NGV were collected as part of the wider Decorative Arts collection until 1981, when a separate department of Costume & Textiles was created. With the opening of the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square, the Australian Fashion & Textiles department was created as a separate entity in 2002.

The first Australian textiles, twenty-nine lace samples attached to two cardboard panels, were donated to the collection in 1922 by Mrs Edwin Field. Mrs Field had published a book in 1909 titled *Australian Lace crochet: Easy and artistic, by a Briton beyond the seas* and these samples were made by her as didactic pieces in an effort to raise the status of lace crochet in Australia.

It was a number of years until the next significant group of Australian textiles were acquired. In 1956 the Gallery purchased six woven linen placemats from the weaver Rachel Grieve and a number of these pieces incorporate images of Australian flora and fauna, such as wattle and a lyrebird, illustrating a common theme in Australian textile arts since the 19th century.

Over the years, the collection has developed through a combination of donations and purchases and, understandably, the range of historical examples has been influenced by what has survived. A recent important donation, and one of the oldest pieces in the collection, is a rare early quilt from the 1840s. Designed as a large central medallion-style pieced patchwork, the central field is of cream linen decorated with appliquéd

